



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA TO PARTICIPATE IN NORTH AMERICAN ANIMAL DISEASE EXERCISE

WASHINGTON, March 18, 2005—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will participate in Equinox 2005, an emergency response exercise based on a hypothetical foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in North America.

Equinox 2005 is part of an ongoing series of FMD exercises of the North American Animal Health Committee—an Emergency Management Working Group (EMWG) made up of the United States, Canada and Mexico. The committee was formed because the potential impact of an outbreak on trade and agriculture extends throughout North America. The United States, Mexico and Canada jointly share FMD response resources and have developed a combined approach for FMD control measures. APHIS leads the U.S. participation in the EMWG.

The intent of the North American exercise program is to provide realistic training on FMD emergency response plans, to practice the executions and to evaluate the results. The program was designed to incorporate scientific rigor and international policy unique to emergency response planning for foreign animal disease outbreaks.

The objectives for Equinox 2005, the third series of North American exercises, will focus on U.S. and Canadian border operations in response to an FMD outbreak and international coordination among the affected states, provinces and federal governments. The exercise will include practicing activation of the existing communications plan, as well as the North American Foot and Mouth Disease Vaccine Bank.

In the exercise, APHIS will facilitate communications between Canada and New England—where a “mock” FMD outbreak will occur—as the exercise unfolds. APHIS will also communicate to government headquarters and supporting agencies to develop the big picture in an emergency situation.

Equinox 2005 will take place on March 21-23—during the vernal equinox—and involves emergency management facilities and state veterinarians located in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire, and at several locations within Quebec and New Brunswick.

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